

## One Aspect In English Teaching—A Feeling For the Language.

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### Preface:

Recently psychologists have turned their attention specifically to the problems of language as a form of human behavior, while those who study language, too, have sought deeper insights into the process of language acquisition. And of course English language teachers in the schools are keenly interested in what scholars in both of these fields have to contribute to the development and improvement of work in teaching English both in the class and language laboratory. In this paper some ideas will be drawn which are valuable to the teachers of recent years from a specific approach to English emerged from association of linguistic scientists and English teachers. This approach, usually called the audio-lingual method, purports to be soundly based on psychological theories. As it becomes more and more widely accepted by English teachers and new textbooks take their tenets from it, teachers should know to what extent its claims to be based on experimentally attested psychological principles are legitimate. To this end, some studies are intended to be made of the theory behind this method and its major assumptions about English learning process which will then be examined in the light of learning theories. And the major assumptions of psychological import to be considered will be drawn from this paper. These assumptions, will be listed with accompanying quotations from the sources chosen. Subsequently these major assumptions, with certain corollaries,

will be discussed in the light of learning theories and researches of the field.

### I. Application of the Principle of Consciousness.

In English teaching in schools learners reproduce materials well in the form of various verbal formulations (rules of grammar or sentences and texts), but they do not feel real links and relations of which they speak. This phenomenon is familiar under the name "formalism." Learners' knowledges of English and their actual command of that language often prove to be formal because, when formulating rules, they lack a feeling for language, and when reproducing speech in English, they do not penetrate its meaning. If an English teacher wishes to incorporate the principle of consciousness effectively in his lessons, he must first make sure that learners always feel what they are talking about, i.e. feel those real links and relations which are treated in speech or writing in English. For this it is necessary that the consciousness of learners should be occupied by the semantic content of speech, and this in turn requires that the mould of the thoughts expressed in English should not be consciously realized, but only felt. Learners with a feeling for language will also be properly conscious of grammatical rules because these rules have, as part of their objective content, the links and relations characteristic of the language itself. Subsequently the simple deduction from the above analysis of consciousness is

that true consciousness in English teaching can only be found when learners develop a feeling for the language. And in wishing to introduce the principle of consciousness into the English teaching process, a teacher must therefore direct his main efforts to compelling learners to feel the language of their study increasingly well.

If learners lack this feeling no devices will be able to ensure the conscious assimilation of the foreign language. The essential difference between teaching a foreign language and a native language is often said to be that in studying the latter learners possess a feeling for language, whereas when studying the former, they do not have this feeling in ready-made form, but have to develop it. If a teacher does not achieve this, the teaching of a language can't fail to be characterized by formalism and when such formalism exists there can be no possibility of learners' mastering language as a practical means of communication.

Therefore, attention must be paid to the specific characteristics of such teaching in incorporating the Principle of Consciousness. The following two points are required of the learners: (a) they study the language while acquiring the appropriate theoretical knowledge, and (b) they acquire mastery of the language, while acquiring practical speech habits and skills. At the same time, teachers must commit into their memories that the application of the principle of consciousness in these two cases (the study of the language and learning to use it) cannot be identical. And theoretical linguistic knowledge acquired by learners always appears in the form of different verbal formulations. But there cannot be any true idea expressed in words if that idea lacks an object. The

Principle of Consciousness is fundamentally infringed when learners are encouraged to learn different formulations by heart without being properly conscious of what these formulations mean. If learners lack this feeling they are compelled to rely exclusively on purely verbal links and relations when learning formulations. The result is the formalism which one finds when learners have a brilliant and firm knowledge of rules but prove incapable of applying these rules in practice. For this reason many teachers are at fault when they require learners to learn rules by rote, while failing to exercise them in the practical application of these rules, devoting almost all the teaching time to the acquisition of linguistic knowledge. If there is no transference from abstract thought to practice, learners' knowledge is unavoidably formal.

How then is the Principle of Consciousness to be realized concerning the practical knowledge of a language?

Not a few teachers have the tendency of fallibility in supposing that learners must master a foreign language consciously (i.e. while constantly taking into account lexical and grammatical peculiarities in the language) for which purpose they are constantly analyzing, ratiocinating and remembering different rules. Such methodological aims are not quite correct for the simple reason that practical knowledge of a language is not based so much on a feeling for language as on habits which have become automatic. The psychological process of reading and understanding an English text book can only be called reading when learners comprehend the semantic content immediately without remembering any rules of grammar.

Consciousness, as applied to the practical mastery of English must be concentrated not on the linguistic mould but on the semantic

content. *The linguistic mould must be grasped intuitively (on the basis of a feeling for language) and not consciously.* On this basis the teacher must be guided by the principle: from the conscious-theoretical study of English to the unconscious-intuitive practical mastery of it. And the legitimate transference of consciousness from the process of activity to its results is, in general, a psychological characteristic of development of habit. If we want learners' practical acquisition of English to be conscious; we must see that they have an intuitive grasp of the language on the basis of a feeling for language. Consciousness in teaching is ensured by carrying out a comparison of the foreign and native language, and that such a comparison is obtained by translation. As a matter of fact, that translation cannot be said true comparison, for that requires not just the juxtaposition of the forms of two different languages, but the conscious realization of all features of similarity and dissimilarity between them.

Consequently the most essential thing in English teaching is the *comprehension* and conscious assimilation of the features of the language, and not the perception and consolidation of those objects of which it is possible to think with the aid of the native language. Supporters of the direct method actively maintain the idea that a teacher must, from the beginning, seek the establishment of a direct twofold link between a foreign word and the object, phenomenon or action indicated by it through non-translating (i.e. visual) expression of its semantics. There is some truth in this because a triple associative link (foreign word—native word—object) really does hinder the command of a foreign language. But the fundamentally wrong point is that the direct method consists in conceiving

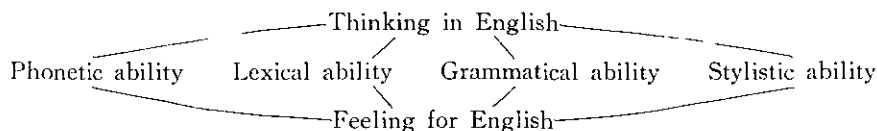
a word as linked with an object, whereas a word should be directly linked, not with an object, but with a concept. In the same way a foreign word must not be directly linked with the object denoted by it. The link between word and object should not be direct but indirect, through the medium of the concept corresponding to the word and not of translation into the native language. The insistence that at the beginning of teaching the link is a triple one, and then becomes one of only two elements (foreign word—object) under the influence of linguistic practice must be incorrect, because what one must have in mind should be the links between words and concepts, not the links between words and objects.

## II. Two abilities are assumed.

Speech in a foreign language in all its basic processes and forms understandably presupposes the possession of two further abilities: The ability to think in a foreign language and ability to make direct and intuitive use of the actual elements of a foreign language (i.e. a feeling for the language in question). And these last two foreign language abilities must be said to be far from identical in what may be called their specific gravity. The ability to think in a foreign language is far from being a basic requisite for the successful mastery of a foreign language. It is rather the other way round; mastery of a foreign language is an essential condition of thinking in that language. Namely thinking in a foreign language is not a condition of mastering that language, but a consequence of it. If one has in mind the functional-dynamical interrelation between a foreign language and thought in that language, this is of course a relationship of organic unity. But this unity

becomes quite impossible when a learner does not command the elements of a language intuitively. Evidently the ability to think in a foreign language and the feeling for language can be considered in detail. If we turn to the characteristics of the two basic types of knowledge of a foreign language, we shall understand why the intuitive-sensory type of knowledge is superior to the rational-logical type. In the first instance, all phonetic, lexical, grammatical and stylistic foreign-language abilities take the form of immediate sensory perception, whereas in the second case they take the form of conscious skills. Intuitive-sensory knowledge of a foreign language is also characterized by fully-realized thinking in the language, whereas the rational-logical type of knowledge involves the linking

of forms in the foreign language with thought in the native language, as the result of which a learner can't dispense entirely either with translation or with the conscious use of linguistic rules. When speaking of foreign language abilities, one must not on any account understand them as the ability to assimilate or acquire a foreign language allegedly present in learners before they begin to learn a foreign language. A learner has not and cannot have abilities existing before the actual practical ability. Before the beginning of this activity a learner can have and has only more or less favourable anatomical—physiological nervous—cerebral predisposition. The mutual interrelations of foreign language abilities may be portrayed as follows:



In general learners' predispositions resemble soil, abilities resemble a plant, while the teacher is the gardener. Just as a capable gardener can grow plants well even in a poor soil, a good teacher can achieve excellent results in the assimilation of a foreign language even when learners do not possess favourable predispositions. The traditional translation grammatical method of teaching English is still widely employed in our schools. When using this method, teachers are said to be only concerned with learners' assimilation of linguistic knowledge, mistakenly supposing that it is only on this knowledge that mastery of English should be based. Constant employment of translation as a basic means of teaching English deprives learners of the ability to think directly in the language. Therefore, as the result of emphasis on grammar and

translation, English lessons become study about language, not of the foreign language and learners naturally do not develop speech-habit or the feeling for language. The translation-grammatical method of teaching does not give the teacher the opportunity to develop his learners' foreign language abilities properly. In contrast to the translation-grammatical method, the direct method of teaching English does considerably assist the development of foreign language abilities and above all of the feeling for the language and of thinking in English, but to accept it in undiluted form is also next to impossible.

The reason for this near impossibility is as follows:

Firstly it is impossible to create within the walls of a school the exact kind of foreign language surroundings which are possible in

life. Secondly, the direct method is entirely based on unconscious intuition, thus conflicting with the principle of consciousness in teaching English. Thirdly, with the direct method both the theory of a language and the native language are entirely banished, despite the fact that theoretical knowledge considerably assists the formation of learners' speech habits and skills in conditions of linguistic practice. Fourthly, when acquiring a foreign language by the direct method learners quickly forget how to use it as soon as they cease to study the language systematically, which shows that associated habits are most stable; whereas habits formed with the help of consciousness are much more stable.

### III. Concluding assumptions.

[1] The process of acquiring a foreign language may have both an intuitive and conscious character. In school teaching conditions the assimilation of a foreign language is conscious, but this must not signify the complete abandonment of the intuitive factor.

[2] The process of teaching English in school must be based on the principle of the organic unity of the foreign language with thought, and of the direct link between these two things. The basic principle of such teaching must be considered that of thinking in English.

[3] It is almost impossible to secure the unity of foreign language and thought by employing translation as the chief and basic method of teaching. Only literal translation may be employed as one of the techniques of explaining the characteristics of thought in English.

[4] An English teacher must always remember the difference between language and speech. Language, being a social phenomenon,

is the sum total of abstract lexical and grammatical elements and norms of communication as the exchange of ideas, while speech is an individual psychological phenomenon, representing the concrete process of such communication.

[5] When learning English at school, learners must study the language theoretically and at the same time learn to use it in practice. As the result of studying the language, they acquire linguistic knowledge, while as the result of acquiring the language of their study, they acquire speech habits and skills.

[6] It is impossible in the process of school teaching to secure from learners the firm assimilation of theoretical knowledge alone and to be content with the fact that their mastery of language is consciously ratiocinative. Attention must be principally devoted to the development of learners' speech habits and skills, in accordance with the rule—from conscious study of English to intuitive speech in the language.

[7] Striving to secure learners' practical mastery of speech in English, one must remember that habits and skills are also different things. It is necessary to develop in learners, not so much habits by means of repetition, as skills by means of exercise in all the basic speech process.

[8] The decisive psychological factor conditioning the practical mastery of a language is linguistic feeling, or the feeling for language, manifested in the form of linguistic intuition. It is therefore absolutely essential, when teaching English, to elaborate and develop learners' feeling for the language of their study, which can be achieved only by means of linguistic practice.

[9] Unless learners have a feeling for the language of their study it is impossible

correctly to embody in the teaching process the basic principle of teaching (consciousness) because it is psychologically possible to recognize only that which is felt. Without a feeling for language, practical use of a language is impossible, and in such a case theoretical knowledge has an extremely formal character.

[10] When training learners in the perception and comprehension of speech and writing in English, a teacher must differentiate between the intuitive perception of the linguistic characteristics of speech and conscious comprehension of its semantic content. It is quite incorrect to fear the intuitive-immediate comprehension of speech (i.e., comprehension without analysis and translation) since this is not its nature. Non-translating comprehension of apprehended speech is the same thing as the ratiocinative-logical comprehension of its content.

[11] When developing learners' active speech in English a teacher must also try to ensure that they concentrate not on the linguistic characteristics of speech, but on the thoughts expressed. It is also necessary to train pupils to make their speech in English not simply reproductively, but productively and creatively.

[12] A teacher must direct his main efforts to the proper mastery by learners of the vocabulary of English, which requires them to assimilate a somewhat different system of concepts. The most rational method of revealing the semantics of foreign words is the extensive interpretation of the concepts expressed by these words. A foreign word must be associated in learners' minds, not with the object designated, and not with a word in the native language, but with the appropriate concept.

[13] Translation from the foreign to the

native language must be employed not as the main means of teaching, but as one of its practical aims.

[14] When developing learners' ability to translate from the foreign to the native language and to give their translation literary form, one must try to ensure that learners previously understand the foreign text without translation on first perceiving it, since translation consists of switching one's thought from forms of a foreign language to forms of the native language. Translation based on conscious-ratiocinative considerations and carried out with the aim of understanding a text is neither true translation nor the true comprehension of a foreign text.

[15] Knowing that the use of language may be receptive, reproductive or productive, the English teacher must employ corresponding exercises in his classes, remembering, however, that the best methods of assimilating a language are the active reproduction of linguistic material and its creative (productive) employment. The receptive assimilation of language is extremely ineffective and does not produce the desired results.

[16] The use of a foreign language has individual characteristics and presupposes the development of special foreign language abilities (chiefly lexical and grammatical). The central foreign-language ability must be considered to be thinking in the foreign language, which presupposes another basic ability—a feeling for the language.

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